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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003629

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/05/2015

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SUBJECT: SUNNI MODERATE GHAZI AL-YAWR DISCUSSES
CONSTITUTION WITH AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary. In separate meetings on September 1 and 3, the Ambassador, urged Deputy President Ghazi al-Yawr to actively support the new constitution. Al-Yawar was pleased with the latest draft, but stressed that the changes must be put before the Iraqi public. Noting that he had just spoken to Arab League SYG Amr Mousa, al-Yawr said that Mousa was pleased with additional language in the draft affirming Iraq's commitment to the Arab League Charter. He, however, had remaining questions regarding state control over oil and gas resources and how regional governments will be represented overseas. Al-Yawr promised to encourage other Sunni Arabs to publicly support the draft by September 12. End Summary.

September 1: The Constitution has come a long way

2. On September 1, Al-Yawr expressed appreciation for USG efforts on behalf of a balanced constitution, and said that while the current version of the document is not perfect, it has many good points and is worthy of Sunni Arab support. He observed that the current draft of the constitution is considerably better than the version of a month ago. Nevertheless, adding that Iraqis see things in "black and white," al-Yawr said that moderate Sunni leaders such as himself need to avoid embracing the constitution in order to prevent attacks on their credibility. "If I defend the constitution," he said, "I shall be seen as pro-U.S. (i.e., not pro-constitution)" At the same time, al-Yawr pledged to encourage Sunnis not to be "reactionary" but to participate in Iraq's political process, including upcoming elections.

3. (C) Al-Yawr said that the issue of constitutional reference to Iraq's Arab identity was much more important for Sunni Arabs than the language on federalism. He said that for Sunnis, this reference was a matter of "our history and our culture," not our ethnicity. He said that if Iraq's Arab identity were adequately mentioned in the constitution, he could marshal the support of at least 300,000 of his Ninewah province constituents. Al-Yawr said that National Dialogue politicians such as Spokesman Saleh Mutlak deserve criticism for obstructionism. However, he stressed that it would be wrong to exclude the Dialogue members from the constitutional discussion. To do so, he warned, would attract even more hard-line Sunnis to their side.

4. (C) Al-Yawr discussed gloomily his concerns about growing Sunni-Shia polarization. He stressed the importance of a resolution to the situation in Tal Afar (septel). He said that inter-sectarian tensions in the city were strengthening the hand of both Sunni and Shia hardliners. He also warned that cases of Sunnis being murdered with impunity threaten to become an "epidemic" in Baghdad. He noted that in many of these incidents, the perpetrators were either Iraqi police or dressed to appear as such, implying Shia responsibility. He said that many Sunni believe the Shia are trying to drive them out of Baghdad. Asked whether Interior Minister Bayan Jabor was capable of turning this situation around, al-Yawr said "diplomatically" that Jabor's thinking is too "sectarian," making it hard for him to be objective.

5. (C) Al-Yawr said that many Sunni Arabs in western Ninewah province feel that they have not had adequate access to voter registration centers and fear equal difficulties on election day. He asked the Ambassador to engage the Election Commission to ensure that Sunnis do not have to travel into Kurdish controlled towns or villages in order to participate in the electoral process.

September 3: Ready to Encourage Support on the Draft

6. (C) In a follow-on meeting September 3, Ghazi reaffirmed his commitment to support the Constitution, but expressed some concern over three remaining issues: Arab identity, the ability of regions to open overseas offices and control of natural resources. Al-Yawr said there was progress in the area of Arab identity, and that he believes this issue is the primary concern of most Sunnis. Noting that he had just spoken with Amr Mousa, Ghazi said the Arab League SYG had agreed to support language in the draft constitution that

would affirm Iraq's commitment to the Arab League Charter. Claiming that in Germany and Ireland Kurdistan Regional Government offices issue notaries and visas, al-Yawr asked for clarification on whether this practice could continue. The Ambassador agreed to raise this issue with the Kurds. Al-Yawr said the formula for state control over resources is a problem. The Ambassador reviewed the present formula and suggested al-Yawr reread the text carefully, specifically the section that ensures that oil and gas resources belong to all the people of Iraq.

17. (C) The Ambassador urged al-Yawr to press Sunni Arabs to narrow their demands to realistic changes, perhaps two or three. Al-Yawr responded that he would meet with other Sunni politicians shortly and promised to hold a press conference with other Sunnis offering support of the Constitution by September 12.
Khalilzad